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INFO RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1715
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RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 3094
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 4543
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RUEHJA/AMEMBASSY JAKARTA 3757
RUEHKL/AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR 3429
RUEHML/AMEMBASSY MANILA 9616
RUEHPF/AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH 0525
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7542
RUEHGP/AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE 6324
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 7346
RUEHGZ/AMCONSUL GUANGZHOU 8888
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 5743
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0981
RUESLE/AMCONSUL SHANGHAI 8289
RUEHSH/AMCONSUL SHENYANG 4899
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE 0354
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 000193

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SUBJECT: TAIWAN: AVIAN FLU UPDATE
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11. Summary. Taiwan continues to be H5N1 free and to prepare to counter a potential Avian Influenza (AI) outbreak. It has staged large-scale drills and distributed information in multiple languages to increase the flow of information to the public. Taiwan's Environmental Protection Agency (TEPA) has trained its staff to handle and dispose of AI-infected waste. Taipei City officials will start a pilot program in early February to stop the slaughtering of birds at traditional markets. In December, surveillance of wild birds detected the third occurrence of low-pathogenic strains of the HN virus on the island since April 2005. End Summary.

Government Conducts AI Response Drill

12. On December 27, the Department of Health (DOH) conducted a tabletop exercise for level B and level C conditions to fine-tune its response to an AI outbreak). The exercise, chaired by Vice Premier Wu Rong-I, was held with the participation of over 20 local governments to clarify their roles and responsibilities. In the exercise scenario, the central government raised the pandemic alert level to "A1" and set up quarantine facilities for travelers from affected areas. The next step in the simulation was a WHO announcement that the global flu pandemic was in WHO phase 5, and Taiwan raised its alert level to "B." Finally, Taiwan entered level "C" as the world was in WHO phase 6. Taiwan uses

the following 5-level system for its pandemic alert levels:

- a) Level 0/Alert: no human-to-human transmission globally and no domestic avian-to-human transmission.
- b) Level A1: confirmed cases of human-to-human transmission outside of Taiwan.
- c) Level A2: confirmed cases of domestic bird-to-human transmission; a laboratory suspected case in Taiwan; or an imported suspected case, but no signs of local human-to-human transmission.
- d) Level B: one or more confirmed cases of initial human-to-human transmission reported domestically.
- e) Level C: Secondary human-to-human transmission reported domestically.

¶3. Council of Labor Affairs (CLA) Chairman Lee Ying-yuan, who acted as the commander of the Central Epidemic Command Center at the drill, stated that an important part of preparation involves strengthening the psychological framework of society. DOH Minister Hou Shen-mou reiterated that defenses against AI were a top priority of the DOH and called on the public to have confidence in government preparations. The DOH conducted a drill for level A1 & A2 pandemic mobilization on July 7, 2005. The officials emphasized that Taiwan remains free of H5N1 and is at the 0 level of the TCDC Pandemic Response system. (Note: Prior to becoming CLA Chairman, Lee was the Secretary General of the Executive Yuan and a key player in drawing up Taiwan's long-term plans to combat AI. End Note.)

Increased Public Awareness

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¶4. Apart from this exercise, health authorities have distributed booklets to the public, established telephone information lines and put up public notices to inform the public about the threat and describe government preparations to counter AI. Notices have been put up in major parks warning the public against feeding birds and mass-transit systems also prohibit carrying birds aboard their vehicles. In order to advise the substantial foreign labor component in Taiwan of the threat, the Council of Labor Affairs (CLA) has also distributed a total of 430,000 information booklets on avian flu in English, Vietnamese, Thai and Indonesian.

TEPA Implements AI Measures

¶5. Taiwan's Environmental Protection Administration (TEPA) has adopted measures for disease prevention and controls and has stepped up efforts to train staff in the event of an AI outbreak. TEPA officials told AIT that at the alert level 0, TEPA is responsible for assisting agricultural authorities to clean up culled animals. (Note: Council of Agriculture (COA) takes charge of handling all the dead birds at all levels and most of the infected animals would be cremated unless a large number of animals need to be destroyed in which case they would be buried.) At A1, A2 and B levels, in addition to assisting COA in handling dead birds, TEPA is responsible for monitoring and assisting health institutions in handling infected waste material; at the C level, TEPA would take over the task of handling all the waste material discharged by infected AI patients. TEPA has strengthened staff training in procedures for protecting workers while handling infected waste. TEPA has purchased 4,000 suits of protective gear for use when managing infected waste. TEPA told AIT that these suits are for the use of the approximately 1,000 front-line TEPA workers who would

respond in the event of an AI outbreak. TEPA has also established a toll free telephone number urging the public to report any suspicious materials.

Traditional Markets to Stop Slaughtering Birds on Site

16. In an effort to curb the spread of viruses, the Taipei City Government plans to stop the slaughtering of chickens at traditional markets. Ten stalls at Nan Men Market will begin the trial program after the Lunar New Year (which commences on January 28). Each stall will receive subsidies for purchasing freezers. The Taipei City government is trying to convince people that freshly killed poultry at the traditional market may not be healthy, and that people should look for a label with a health certificate when purchasing poultry meat. There are more than 300 COA workers monitoring the operations of the slaughterhouses.

Low Pathogenic Strains of HN Viruses Found for Third Time

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17. In routine fecal sampling by Taiwan's Wild Bird Federation and COA on Dec. 14, the H5N2 and H7N3 viruses - low pathogenic strains of the HN family of viruses - were found for the second time in the Guandu marshlands in northern Taiwan. The H7N3 virus was previously found in Guandu in April 2005 and was also found in marshlands near Tainan in Southern Taiwan in November 2005. COA has warned the public to take extra precautions in the upcoming January to March flu season.

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